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SUBJECT: BELGIAN FORMIN IN GOMA

¶1. Following his visit to Kinshasa, Belgian Foreign Minister Steven Vanackere visited Goma January 20-21. He was accompanied by Africa Director (and former Ambassador to Congo) Renier Nijsskens, Ambassador Struye de Swielande, and other officials to a breakfast meeting with diplomats based in Goma on January 21.

¶2. Vanackere was making his first visit to Africa and sought the views of his guests on the situation in Eastern Congo. Vanackere, only appointed as Foreign Minister in November 2009, was careful to avoid making any declarations of his own, limiting himself to agreement with Goma officer's statement that externally imposed solutions would gain little or no support from the GDRC or from other political or military actors. Solutions, he said, had to come from the Congolese themselves.

¶3. According to press reports, Vanackere was asked by President Kabila to ensure that King Albert attend Congo's 50th anniversary celebrations on June 30. Although he acknowledged that memories of the 1960s still resonate in the minds of many Congolese, including those not then born, he offered no indication of concern about the possibility suggested by some observers, that Kabila may be seeking to reincarnate Lumumba's famous denunciation of Belgian rule in King Baudouin's presence in June 1960.

¶4. Among other activities, Vanackere met with MONUC officials and with the Technical Commission for Ratification and Reconciliation of the STAREC program. STAREC officials told Goma-based officer that Vanackere was in listening mode during the 90 minute meeting and took on board their requests for financial assistance (also made separately to other Goma-based representatives) without making any commitment.

¶5. Comment: The complexities of the Congo are undoubtedly particularly challenging for Belgian policy makers. Vanackere, while giving no impression of being overwhelmed, freely acknowledged his lack of current issues. The approach to the anniversary celebrations in June is likely to be a test for the new Minister and his advisers. End comment.

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